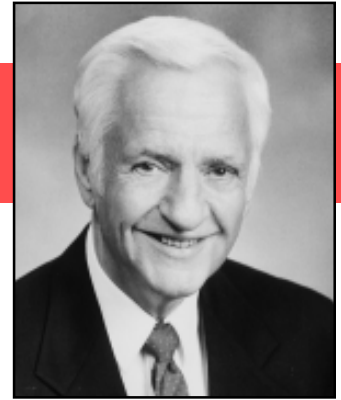


R E P R E S E N T A T I V E

Paul Zellinsky Sr.

D I S T R I C T 2 3

The 1998 Agenda



Winter 1998

Dear Friends,

As the 1998 session opens, transportation is the subject everyone discusses. Each day, the snarls of traffic on our roads and highways seem to grow more tangled. Clearly, we must act to solve this problem. At the same time, our robust economy has generated more revenue than budget forecasters predicted. As a result, we have an \$861 million state budget surplus.

That surplus is another key topic this year. Every lawmaker has a different idea of how it should be spent or saved. You can expect much more debate on this subject in the coming weeks. We also have education issues to consider. Less than half of the fourth-graders in our state met the standards of literacy we have established for students in their age group.

Stronger penalties for drunken driving are also on our minds this year. We must make it clear that the people of Washington will not tolerate habitual drunks behind the wheel.

These are only a few of the issues that will be discussed this session. The information in this newsletter provides further detail on the upcoming session and what it means for 23rd District residents. I hope you will take the time to read it, and share your ideas, questions and concerns. My legislative assistant, Tim Atteberry, will be happy to help you if you're having difficulties with an agency, or if you need to arrange a time to chat with me.

Sincerely,

TOP ISSUES for 1998

- *Transportation*
- *Education*
- *Budget*
- *DUI penalties*

Transportation — funding improvements without a tax increase

"No gas tax increase." In polls and surveys around the state, citizens say it again and again. We have listened; you won't see a gas tax increase pass the House this year. Our legislative leaders, including the Speaker of the House, have ruled it out already.

I understand the public's concern. The perception is that the state has enough money already, and we should be able to find money for road projects from existing sources. Furthermore, when the state has a budget surplus of almost \$1 billion, it doesn't seem right that citizens should be asked to pay higher taxes.

At the same time, our transportation system desperately needs repairs and improvements. I can assure you that we will address this problem and find additional funding for transportation projects. At this early stage of the session, it is impossible to say which plan

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- Financial Institutions and Insurance, *vice chair*
- Transportation Policy and Budget
- Health Care

will be approved, but the final decision is likely to include a combination of some or all of the following elements:

- Shifting additional revenue from the Motor Vehicle Excise Tax (MVET) to transportation improvements;
- Reducing the MVET, paid annually when you renew your vehicle license;

- Applying a portion of the budget surplus to transportation projects;
- Developing new cost-efficient construction procedures;
- Pursuing savings suggested by results of a Department of Transportation audit to be completed early this year; and
- Offering sales tax credits on transportation projects

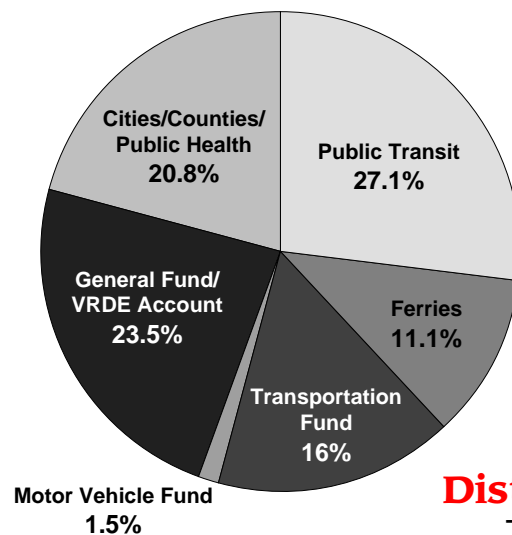
MVET — The unkindest tax

The license tab fees you pay each year — known as the Motor Vehicle Excise Tax — are too high. It's that simple. The average working family pays property taxes, sales taxes, gas taxes and an assortment of other fees to the state. After paying so much, it is understandable that citizens become frustrated with paying yet another fee just to drive a car to work and back.

For the owners of newer cars, the MVET is particularly onerous, because the state calculates the rate based on unfair values. Everyone knows that the value of a new car decreases substantially the moment you drive it off the lot — but the state doesn't acknowledge that. Instead, it bases its MVET rate on the Manufacturer's Suggested Retail Price (MSRP), whether you paid that price or not. And the rate stays at that level for two years. Clearly, changes are in order.

A portion of the MVET revenue — roughly 24 percent — goes to the state general fund. I think that's too much. From the public's viewpoint, money from a tax on vehicles should be paying for transportation expenses, especially when we have so many projects that require attention.

This session, I expect to see a reduction in overall MVET rates to address the legitimate concerns of citizens who are paying too much, and a shift of MVET revenues from the general fund to transportation. Maintenance and improvement of our roads, highways and ferries is one of the primary duties of state government, and we need to be flexible enough to adjust our priorities when the need demands it.

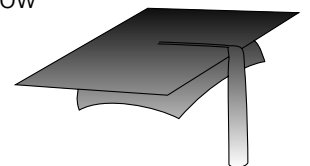


**MVET
Distributions**
Total 1997-99:
\$1.59 billion

Education

When children can't read, they can't learn. That's why our priority in education continues to be improving the literacy of our K-12 students and encouraging parental involvement. Recent test scores among fourth-grade students show that less than half of them met the standards of reading ability for their age.

In the Legislature, we have been making reading education a top priority for the past several years. Key legislative leaders have been making a real crusade out of correcting the problems in the way reading is now taught, and bringing effective, research-based techniques back into each and every classroom.



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Ferries — the push for service and accountability

Constituents continue to raise concerns about the passenger-only ferry dock in Seattle and the controversy surrounding stainless steel piping in the Issaquah class ferries. These are frustrating problems. Our ferry system must be accountable to taxpayers, and to other members of the Legislature. Unless we clean our own house, we can hardly expect the support we need to obtain a fourth ferry and the expanded jumbo service 23rd District residents seek.

I have discussed these problems with ferry system officials, and made it clear that a strong message needs to be sent regarding departmental procedures and disciplinary policies. I will continue to monitor this issue closely, and keep you apprised of new developments.

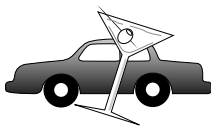


The budget — holding the line

You can expect a “hold-the-line” supplemental budget that will remain well within the limits established by Initiative 601. These limits are reasonable and fair. They account for inflation and population growth. When people talk about the budget, they sometimes fail to grasp the sheer magnitude of the dollars they discuss — every dime generated by you, the taxpayers. Our budget for 1997-99 is slightly more than \$19 billion. If we divided that money up, we could give every man, woman and child in our state about \$3,400.

DUI penalties

We cannot repair the tragedies caused by habitual drunken drivers, but we can do more to prevent them from getting behind the wheel of a car. I expect to see several proposals this year that would expand the penalties for DUI offenses. Here are some of the ideas the Legislature will discuss:



- Require certain people convicted of drunk driving to operate only vehicles equipped with ignition interlock devices
- Authorize impoundment and forfeiture of vehicles operated by individuals with a suspended or revoked driver's license
- Authorize impoundment of vehicles whenever a driver violates DUI laws
- Increase fines and jail times nearly threefold for people convicted of DUI, and add extra penalties for repeat offenders
- Require a motorist's driver's license to be administratively suspended for 90 days without exception for a first DUI conviction

A record to remember

We don't pass bills and forget about them. Results count, and after we set policy, we make sure it translates to results. Part of our job this year is to implement the major policy reforms we passed in 1997. We have a strong record to build on for 1998. Here's what we'll be monitoring this year:

SPOTLIGHT ON NEW POLICY

What to watch

- **Juvenile justice reform**
 - Tougher sentencing standards
 - Sentencing alternatives, including boot camps
 - Mandatory parental involvement in juvenile court cases
 - Juvenile justice grants for local communities
- **Welfare reform**
 - Time limits on benefits (five years over one's lifetime)
 - Requirements to work, search for work or perform community service
 - Child-care assistance for working parents
 - Job training
 - Teen parents must live at home and progress toward a diploma or GED to receive benefits
- **Budget**
 - Holding the line on spending
 - Protecting I-601 limits
- **Property taxes**
 - Temporary 4.7 percent cut in state rate becomes permanent in 1998 (Referendum 47)
 - Local governments must vote publicly before raising property taxes above inflation rate

Please
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stamp
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Rep. Paul Zellinsky
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Your voice counts

I want to make sure you have a chance to share your views with me. If you have a comment, question or concern, please write it in the space below and return it to me.

Sincerely, *Paul Zellinsky Sr.*

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